

Addressing Animal Welfare Concerns in Dairy Farming

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Defining Animal Welfare:

Animal welfare means how an animal is coping with the conditions in which it lives. An animal is in a good state of welfare if (as indicated by evidence) it is healthy, comfortable, well nourished, safe, able to express innate behavior, and if it is not suffering from unpleasant states such as pain, fear, and distress.

--AVMA

The Five Freedoms:

Farm Animal Welfare Committee (FAWC), UK Welfare Code, 1979.

Freedom from hunger and thirst, by ready access to water and a diet to maintain health and vigor.

Freedom from discomfort, by providing an appropriate environment.

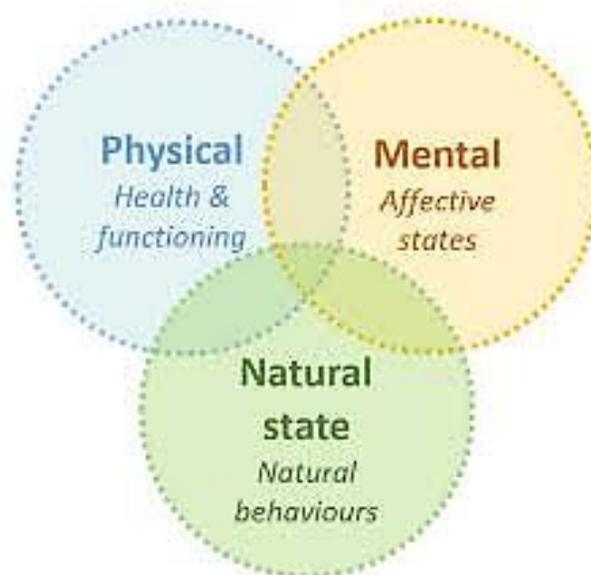
Freedom from pain, injury and disease, by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.

Freedom to express normal behavior, by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and appropriate company of the animal's own kind.

Freedom from fear and distress, by ensuring conditions and treatment, which avoid mental suffering.

The Three Domains of Animal Welfare:

Dr. David Fraser



Animal Right vs. Animal Welfare:

These two ideas are often confused but they are actually quite different. Both are ethical philosophies which essentially attempt to define right and wrong in regard to our relationships with animals. In my mind I simply these two philosophies down to these key differences:

- **Animal Welfare:** This philosophy is essentially focused on doing our best to provide a good life for the animals that we encounter whether they are pets, farm animals, work animals or wild animals. Under this belief we can own animals, but we are responsible for providing those in our care with a good life.
- **Animal Rights:** This philosophy goes a step further in that it believes that animals have rights equal to humans and that we don't have the right to hold dominion over animals. Under this belief we should not own, eat or use animals (they see them equal to humans, so anything we would not do to another human we should not do to animals).

Essentially all who work in agriculture are practicing animal welfare, whether we do it well or not. Of the activist which we encounter most fall on a spectrum from being focused on animal welfare to those focused on animal rights. Those on the animal welfare end of the spectrum focused on improving animal care and they are essentially our allies, whether we choose to accept them. But those on the animal rights end are the spectrums are opposed to animal ownership and farming. Some of these groups are pretty civil but some are militant, and several are recognized as domestic terrorists. It is this last group which represents a significant risk. That said they are still a very small portion of the population and they are not representative of the wider public and particularly of our consumers. As we think about animal care and welfare and how we communicate what we do, we must remember that we are speaking to our consumers and the public (who are generally innocent). We can create allies if we are smart.

What to Expect from a Third Party Animal Welfare Audit:

- Some Audit program will require an application process and potentially document review to be done before the audit.
- Most audits are scheduled and are not surprise audits.
- Who will do the audit? Depending on the nature of the audit the auditor may be independent.
 - For second party audits (FARM) the auditor is often a member of coop or milk handler staff and someone you know well. They don't have to be independent.
 - For third party audits the auditor has to be independent and hired as a contractor of the audit company or coop. These auditors should be certified by an animal auditing company (PAACO etc.).
- Most audits will involve a combination of:
 - Interview questions speaking to the farm manager and sometimes staff members.
 - Document review, most audits which require specific employee standard operating procedures, training documentation for employees, and treatment, mortality and health records.
 - Farm Review and Observations, finally the auditor will make observations of the farm, building and the animals. This includes specific animal scoring measures and key observations (water, feed, bedding and housing quality)

- Finally, most audits will end with an exit interview. While this is not the official results it will give you a good idea of what looks great and where there is room for improvement.
- You should receive a follow-up communication from the audit company with the official results and any follow-up needed.
- Each auditing company is different in how they manage follow-up and certificates.

Here are a few Key Animal Measures for Dairy Welfare:

The Best way to evaluate animal Welfare is with Objective Repeated Animal Measures and Observation. “If you can measure it you can manage it.” These are typically used to score animal welfare during audits, but you can use them too, to monitor animal welfare on your farm between audits.

1. Lameness
2. Body Condition Score
3. Lesion and Injuries
4. Hygiene scores
5. Mortality rates
6. Illness (Morbidity) rate
7. Cow Longevity
8. Somatic Cells Score

Meggan’s Keys of Excellent Animal Welfare:

These are my opinion and should be taken as such.

1. It comes down to farmer’s philosophy.
 - a. But if you don’t believe, share and show that philosophy it is no good.
2. Ownership is key (for employees and farmers).
3. The best care takers are details people.
4. The best farmers are always experimenting and learning (some of my favorite farmers are blue collar philosophers and scientists).
5. The best farmers aren’t always the best managers (these are two very different skills and types of communication).
6. Patients is indeed a virtue especially with cows.
7. A nurturing nature is invaluable, especially for calves (being motherly in a good thing)
8. You can teach a cow guy to drive a tractor, but you can’t teach a tractor guy to care for cows.
9. Good Welfare will make you money.

NOTES
